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Lesson 2. Prayer and Fasting

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Lesson 2. Prayer and Fasting

I. THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER

- A. Prayer is central to the Christian faith, described biblically as the spiritual lifeline connecting humanity directly to God. It is not merely a religious exercise; prayer represents intimate communication, akin to a conversation between a child and a loving father. Through prayer, believers express dependence on God, experience His presence, and align their lives with His will.
- B. The Psalmist articulates the essence of prayer vividly: “When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.” (Psalm 91:15, ESV)
- C. Prayer assures believers that God is accessible, attentive, and actively involved in responding to their needs and situations.

II. THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PRAYER

- A. The Scriptures offer clear insights into the role and power of prayer in a believer’s life.
- B. **God’s Readiness to Respond:** Isaiah declares God’s eagerness to hear and respond: “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.” (Isaiah 65:24, ESV)
- C. Prayer, therefore, is not about informing God of our needs but about actively engaging in trust and dependency on His faithfulness.

III. PERSISTENT AND EXPECTANT PRAYER

- A. Jesus encourages persistent, expectant prayer in the Sermon on the Mount: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7, ESV)
- B. This persistence reflects faith in God’s character, acknowledging Him as both willing and able to meet our deepest needs.

IV. INTERCESSION AND LOVE

- A. Scripture instructs believers not only to pray for personal needs but to extend prayers to others, including those in authority and even those who persecute or

oppose them (1 Timothy 2:1, Matthew 5:44): “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44, ESV)

B. Intercessory prayer demonstrates love and obedience, transforming hearts and circumstances by God’s power.

V. THE MODEL OF PRAYER: THE LORD’S PRAYER

A. Jesus provides the definitive model for prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, outlining several vital elements:

1. **Recognition of God’s Sovereignty:** Acknowledging God as our Heavenly Father and sovereign King.
2. **Worship and Praise:** Honoring and revering God’s holiness and majesty.
3. **Submission to God’s Will:** Praying for the fulfillment of God’s kingdom purposes.
4. **Provision:** Requesting daily needs and expressing dependence.
5. **Forgiveness:** Confessing sin and seeking forgiveness, extending forgiveness to others.
6. **Protection:** Asking for deliverance from temptation and evil.

B. This comprehensive model guides believers in structuring their prayers holistically, ensuring alignment with God’s intentions and purposes.

VI. THE PURPOSE AND POWER OF FASTING

A. Fasting complements prayer, serving as a discipline that intensifies spiritual focus and clarity. Historically, fasting involves abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. However, broader definitions now include abstaining from various luxuries, distractions, or comforts to foster deeper intimacy with God.

B. **Biblical Context of Fasting:** Biblical fasting frequently involves going without food. Old Testament Hebrew references to fasting literally mean “to cover the mouth,” emphasizing abstention. In the New Testament, Jesus assumes His followers will fast, offering guidance for genuine practice: “And when you fast, do not look gloomy...but anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret.” (Matthew 6:16-18, ESV)

C. Fasting, according to Jesus, is primarily a private matter aimed at drawing closer to God, not gaining human recognition.

VII. NOTABLE BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF FASTING

A. Scripture includes several prominent examples of individuals and communities using fasting as a spiritual discipline:

1. **Moses:** Fasted forty days receiving the Law (Exodus 34:28).
2. **Daniel:** Practiced fasting for divine revelation and wisdom (revelation and wisdom (Daniel 9:3).
3. **Jesus:** Modeled fasting during temptation, emphasizing spiritual strength over physical weakness (Matthew 4:1-11).
4. **Early Church:** Integrated fasting into ministry decisions, such as the commissioning of leaders (Acts 14:23).

VIII. SPIRITUAL OUTCOMES OF FASTING

A. Fasting is often associated with powerful spiritual breakthroughs:

1. **Deliverance and Spiritual Authority:** Jesus taught that certain spiritual challenges require fasting and prayer for effective resolution (Matthew 17:14-21). Fasting helps develop a deeper relationship with Christ, empowering believers to confront and overcome spiritual opposition.
2. **Increased Spiritual Sensitivity:** Fasting heightens awareness of personal and corporate sin, prompting repentance and restoration (1 Samuel 7:6, Nehemiah 9:1-2). It opens spiritual ears and hearts, making believers more receptive to conviction and direction from God.
3. **Clarity and Wisdom:** Daniel's fasting resulted in significant insight and guidance for leadership (Daniel 10:1-3). Through fasting, believers gain supernatural clarity, discernment, and wisdom to make critical decisions and understand divine purposes clearly. (Acts 14:23)

IX. PRACTICAL GUIDE TO INCORPORATING PRAYER AND FASTING

A. Developing a Consistent Prayer Life

1. Set aside regular, dedicated times daily for personal prayer.
2. Utilize Scripture-based prayers and the Lord's Prayer model to structure prayer sessions effectively.
3. Keep a prayer journal to document God's responses and maintain accountability to prayer commitments.

B. Effective Fasting Practices

1. Begin with manageable fasting periods (e.g., one meal, partial-day fasts), gradually progressing to extended durations.
2. Clearly define fasting purposes (clarity, breakthrough, intercession) to maintain spiritual focus.
3. Integrate prayer, Scripture reading, and quiet reflection during fasting periods for maximum spiritual benefit.

X. CONCLUSION

Prayer and fasting are deeply transformative spiritual disciplines vital to cultivating intimacy with God and spiritual effectiveness in ministry. By regularly engaging in these practices, believers position themselves to experience divine empowerment, clarity, breakthrough, and profound spiritual growth. Embracing the disciplines of prayer and fasting not only enhances individual spiritual lives but also significantly impacts broader community and ministry contexts, driving deeper spiritual renewal and awakening.

This lesson was provided by Joshua Nations (JoshuaNations.org).